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PARENTS URGED TO KEEP ADOLESCENTS' VACCINATIONS UP-TO-DATE

Adolescent Immunization Week is June 5-11

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Protecting against serious illness doesn't stop at pre-kindergarten vaccinations. Some children fall behind on their immunization schedules, and other vaccines are not given until adolescence. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) urges parents to make sure their adolescent children's immunizations are up-to-date. Vaccines are among the most successful and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease and death. They not only protect vaccinated individuals from potentially serious diseases, they also help protect entire communities by preventing and reducing the spread of disease.

Immunizations recommended for adolescents include the Tdap, MMR, varicella, hepatitis B and meningococcal vaccines. Parents should check with their child's doctor to make sure the child stays on schedule.

"Beginning July 1, a new Virginia law requires children who will be enrolled in the sixth grade this fall to receive one dose of Tdap vaccine," said Jim Farrell, director of the Division of Immunization. "We're strongly advising parents to call their child's doctor now to make sure their child receives this important vaccine before school starts."

The Tdap vaccine protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. Tetanus, also called lockjaw, causes painful tightening of the muscles, usually all over the body. It can also lead to "locking" of the jaw so the sick person cannot open his mouth or swallow. Diphtheria is a serious disease that causes a thick covering in the back of the throat and can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure and even death. Pertussis, also called whooping cough, causes coughing spells so bad that it is often hard to eat, drink or breathe. The illness can last for weeks.

The recent increase in the number of reported cases of mumps following the outbreak in Midwestern states this spring is a reminder that everyone should receive the recommended doses of the MMR vaccine. The MMR vaccine protects against measles, mumps and rubella. Measles causes a fever, cough and rash. It can sometimes lead to complications such as lung problems, ear infections and brain damage. Mumps causes fever, headache and painful swelling of the jaw. Rubella, also called German measles, causes rash, fever and swelling or stiffness in the joints. It can cause serious injury to the fetus during pregnancy.

Hepatitis B causes serious liver disease and can lead to fatigue, severe stomach pains and yellowing of the skin and eyes. The varicella vaccine protects against chickenpox, a common childhood disease that causes fever, rash and itching.

College-bound teens should also make sure they have received their meningococcal and hepatitis B vaccines. In Virginia, all new full-time students at any public four-year college or university must be vaccinated against both diseases or must sign a waiver refusing the vaccines. Anyone can get meningococcal disease (usually meningitis or blood poisoning), but college freshmen, particularly those who live in dormitories, have a slightly higher risk than other university students or adults generally.

For more information on these and other vaccines, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/nip>.

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